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Column 1

The outfit
that spies
on the CIABehind closed doors
at the 'Fifth Estate'

By John Maclean

Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON—The telephone calls are handled with a minimum of identification. "Yes," answers a girl's voice.

And after a four-flight ride in an anonymous box elevator, someone calls out from behind a locked door, "Who is it?"

Amid the dinginess of Washington's DuPont Circle neighborhood, the Fifth Estate was just another trendy public interest group. Dreaming dreams of Nader's Raiders, they called themselves "spywatchers" and gathered a mantle of conspiratorial enterprise around themselves to keep off the chill when the rent fell due.

BUT SUDDENLY, THE Fifth Estate was pushed into a harsh spotlight. First, the Central Intelligence Agency and then President Ford fixed responsibility on it for the murder of Richard Welch, the CIA station chief in Athens.

"The CIA is trying to get at its enemies in Congress and in the press by attacking us," says Douglas Porter, a bearded, 25-year-old researcher for Fifth Estate who used to be an anti-war activist.

A statement by the Fifth Estate turns the blame back onto the CIA. "If anyone is to blame for Mr. Welch's death, it is the CIA that sent him there to spy and perhaps even to intervene in the affairs of the Greek government."

WHAT FIFTH ESTATE did that so infuriated the CIA was to identify Welch as a CIA man in their occasional journal, Counter-Spy, and in an accompanying article to call for the "neutralization" of CIA men abroad.

The "blowing" of Welch's cover CIA spokesmen said, marked him for the three unidentified gunmen who shot him down last week. Even the liberal Washington Post editorialized that the Fifth Estate action may have "set Mr. Welch up for the hit."

But Porter doesn't see it that way. "Welch's cover was blown eight years ago," Porter said, referring to a listing of Welch's name in "Who's Who in CIA," a book published in East Germany in 1967 and generally attributed to the Soviet KGB.

is to report the names of CIA men only after they appear in foreign journals, and never to be the first to blow a cover identity.

"Cover is a very scary game," Porter said. "We won't blow cover the first time."

Welch's murder appeared to vindicate claims by CIA officials that disclosure of their agent's identities would result in killings, and a less effective CIA. This has been a principal concern since former agents like Philip Agee, and congressional committees, like that of Sen. Frank Church (D., Idaho), began attaching names to CIA deeds.

BUT PORTER argues that CIA station chiefs are well known abroad, and only citizens of the U. S. are denied information about their identities. Welch, for example, was identified as CIA station chief in Peru by a Peruvian newspaper (he later was transferred to Greece) before his name was listed in Counter-Spy.

Station chiefs usually operate under "light cover" when attached to embassies abroad, and often can be found in the embassy directories under the listing "office of special assistant to the ambassador," as was Welch. The light cover is an advantage when potential defectors, political activists, and others want to approach the CIA.

But Porter admits using the word "neutralization" in discussing CIA personnel abroad was going too far.

"IF WE PRINTED it today, we wouldn't use the word neutralize," Porter said. "We never figured we were going to have to deal with this kind of flak."

The summer issue of Counter-Spy, in which the Fifth Estate published a list of CIA station chiefs, also included a commentary by Philip Agee.

"The most effective and important systematic efforts to combat CIA that can be undertaken right now are, I think, the identification, exposure, and neutralization of its people working abroad," Agee wrote. "The people themselves will have to decide what they must do to rid themselves of CIA."

PORTER ARGUES THAT Agee merely meant that agents' identities should be exposed. But a 7-year-old with some knowledge of television spy jargon could infer Agee meant kill.

Counter-Spy, which circulates about 3,000 copies among academics and intelligence enthusiasts, carries a regular feature "We Thought You'd Like to Know: CIA Around the World" which includes names, job descriptions, and sometimes photographs of CIA personnel in the U. S. and abroad.

The magazine also has carried articles on CIA's labor ties, the Phoenix program—a CIA-run program of "interrogation" of Viet Cong suspects, which critics charge was really an assassination program—and other publicly discussed CIA actions.

"democratic secret police" in the words of the man who collected the seed money, Norman Mailer, the New York City writer.

THE STAFFERS SAY the magazine is not their main enterprise. Fifth Estates Mailer announced the formation of Fifth Estate in an admittedly drunken moment at his 50th birthday party in 1974. The occasion caused more derision



AP Wirephoto

Doug Porter, coeditor of Counter-Spy, says the magazine is not responsible for the murder of CIA agent Richard Welch and plans to print the names of 70 other CIA agents.

than serious discussion, but nonetheless Fifth Estate has kept running for 2½ years since then.

Operating on a budget of less than \$20,000 a year, the organization gets heavily into debt each time Counter-Spy is published, then recoups financial strength from subscriptions [\$6 a year], and direct mail appeals. Mailer donated about \$9,000 over the years, as well as an article titled "The CIA vs Democracy."

ITS THREE ORIGINAL researchers, including Porter, hold other jobs, like bartending. Times got so bad at one point they moved their printing operation in one staff member's basement.

Through it all, journalists dropped by to trade information on the seamy underside of the intelligence world (Porter said the list of station chiefs came from one journalist). Former intelligence operators who wanted to come out of the closet did so through the Fifth Estate.

The Fifth Estate intends to "hang tough" on the CIA, in Porter's words. Their next issue of Counter-Spy is said to contain names of CIA agents in Angola, France, and Sweden.

"We want to make this issue of intelligence operations endure beyond the chicness of it all," Porter said.

With the murder of Welch, a lot of chicness were off.

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